

Review Guidelines for NIH Small Research Grant (R03) Award Mechanism

The R03 mechanism most frequently is provided to support discrete, well-defined projects that can be completed within a short timeframe with limited funding/resources.

The types of projects commonly supported by the R03 mechanism include:

- Pilot or feasibility studies
- Secondary analysis of existing data
- Small, self-contained research projects
- Development of research methodology
- Development of new research technology

In 2003, the NIH implemented an investigator-initiated Small Grant Program (R03) with the Program Announcement (PA-03-108). Thirteen Institutes and Centers are participating and will accept applications via this PA: NEI, NIA, NIAAA, NIAID, NIBIB, NICHD, NIDA, NIDCR, NIEHS, NIMH, NINDS, NINR, and NLM. Participating and non-participating Institutes and Centers of NIH also offer other Program Announcements for the small research grant R03 mechanism. Principal investigators applying for NIH support by submitting a grant application utilizing the R03 mechanism must provide the pertinent program announcement (PA, PAR, PAS) on the Face Page of the application. Without this information, an application may not be assigned to the R03 mechanism upon receipt by the Center for Scientific Review. Investigators submitting applications using the investigator-initiated R03 mechanism program announcement must propose research/work appropriate to the participating Institutes and Centers.

The specifics often differ amongst R03 program announcements. The timeframe of these projects is usually for 2-3 years with a funding level of \$50,000 per year. However, timeframe, maximum funding, research plan page limitations, introduction page limitations (usually 1 page) preliminary data requirements, acceptable appendix materials, and other items [such as whether equipment may be purchased, the number of revisions (usually one) that may be submitted, or if projects may be renewed] vary. For example, program announcements for the R03 mechanism may encourage small projects to obtain preliminary data likely to lead to an R01 application; they may encourage high risk, high innovation projects; and they may be specific for international investigators doing research in areas with NIH-committed resources or investigators in resource-constrained foreign countries. Please note that an application being submitted as an

R03 that was submitted previously under another mechanism is considered a new application and should not have an Introduction.

REVIEW GUIDELINES:

Review of R03 mechanisms should be based upon the [five standard review criteria](#) (Significance, Approach, Innovation, Investigators, and Environment) and should include an Overall Evaluation. Reviewers should also determine whether the principal investigator has addressed adequately the NIH requirements for the use of Human Subjects and Vertebrate Animals in research. As with other mechanisms, after the evaluation of the scientific merit of the application, reviewers should address whether the Budget is reasonable for the work proposed. Also, some program announcements require plans for Data Sharing.

Additional considerations for the R03 mechanism include:

SIGNIFICANCE: The IC to which the application is assigned will determine whether the application is responsive to the pertinent program announcement. Reviewers should evaluate the project for timeliness and the significance of the topic/issue being addressed.

APPROACH: R03 applications usually will not have the same level of detail or extensive discussion of experimental methodologies and background information. Appropriate justification for the research may be provided through literature, citations, data from other sources, or investigator-generated data. However, it is important to note that preliminary data typically are not required to justify support for these studies. Indeed, for some program announcements, such as those on secondary data analysis, the generation of new data is not permitted. Therefore, less emphasis should be placed on the traditional indicators that are used in the review of R01 mechanisms. Instead, reviewers should evaluate the conceptual framework and general approach to the problem. If preliminary data are provided, they must be evaluated scientifically.

INVESTIGATOR: Additional weight may be given to the qualifications and track record of the principal investigator. However, R03 program announcements often are designed to support research of scientists in the early stages of establishing independent research careers.